

White Paper Report

Report ID: 109251

Application Number: PW-51478-13

Project Director: A. Kevin Reinhart (a.kevin.reinhart@dartmouth.edu)

Institution: American Research Institute in Turkey

Reporting Period: 5/1/2013-4/30/2015

Report Due: 7/31/2015

Date Submitted: 7/15/2014

White Paper

NEH HCRR Grant PW-51478-13

America in the Near East, 1819-2010: Preservation and Access Planning for the American Mission Board (ABM) Collection

A. Kevin Reinhart

American Research Institute in Turkey

July 15, 2014

a. Project Activities

The main goal of the project was to survey and assess the Istanbul archive of the Near East Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (American Board archive) for its preservation needs and research value.

Work progress

The grant-funded work included support for the travel, maintenance, and services of the archivist who worked for four months in 2013 and conducted the archival assessment. Grant funds also supported the digitizing of records that are important to both the cataloging project and digital archive.

The [American Research Institute in Turkey](#) is a U.S. non profit overseas research center dedicated to supporting advanced research and academic and cultural exchanges in Turkey. In 2010, ARIT negotiated joint ownership of the archives of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions in Istanbul. Inherent in the agreement is a plan to provide cataloging and digital access to the archive for scholars and the interested public. In 2012 ARIT negotiated a protocol with SALT Archives in Galata, Istanbul, to house and present the American Board digital archive on line.

The project partners include SALT Archives in Istanbul and the Digital Library for International Research (DLIR). SALT is a multi-faceted Turkish non-profit cultural institution that houses the [SALT Archives](#) and Research facilities. SALT stores the American Board collection in archival conditions and hosts the ongoing work. SALT interns helped process the documents. SALT also provided scanning and web services.

The [DLIR](#) operates through the Center for Research Libraries in cooperation with the Council of American Overseas Research Centers and the American Institute of Yemeni Studies. The DLIR hosts the Istanbul Digital Library that makes accessible rare pamphlets and periodicals from the American Board Library collection. DLIR has published two significant collections of the archival materials as part of the grant project .

Archival analysis

The four months of grant work was divided into two periods. During the first two months archivist Diane Ryan prepared a collection level inventory representing 4,363 files. The total page count of the unprocessed archive is around 315,000, excluding around 3,000 photographs and 100 plans and maps.

The archivist examined the archival container types to determine needs and time required for processing. Sample container level inventories were prepared for each of the container categories:

Box – Most of the archives are stored in large packing boxes containing 3-4 feet of records. There are approximately 150 boxes of materials totalling approximately 525 linear feet.

Bound volume – A number of the documents are bound into indexed books. There are 285 bound volumes with varied numbers of pages, many around 400 pp.

Envelope – These contain papers collected in standard manila envelopes. They tend to contain financial records and correspondence beginning in the 1920s. There are approximately 3,700 envelopes.

Folder – These consist of papers filed in standard file folders, numbering approximately 334. The folders generally contain documents from the more recent decades of the 20th century.

Transfer box – There are 86 self indexing files in medium-sized cardboard containers. Transfer boxes generally contain documents from the early 20th century.

Bundle – These are papers that are organized into bundles and tied with string. The contents are comparable to the envelopes or folders, generally covering earlier decades including the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Notebook – There are a few loose-leaf notebooks, comparable to the folders and envelopes in organization and content.

From the inventories and documentation, the archivist set up the cataloging system and developed the archival tools for processing the archive. In conjunction with the SALT Archives staff, she developed a catalog data entry template and metadata scheme based on Dublin Core and identified the list of LCNA subject headings. She established a style sheet for the staff and collection and series level finding aids. Once the inventory was completed, a sample series on the Near East Relief was searched and extracted from the inventory for detailed cataloging and digitization.

ARIT librarian Brian Johnson provided background reading material, [collection and series descriptions](#), [timelines and maps](#), and the lists of names and place names and their variants drawn from the archives' existing documentation.

As a result of the first phase of the project, two collections of archival documents were chosen for scanning and digitizing. These include the American Board Personnel Card File and Memorial Book. This documentation of many key actors in the Mission provides an essential cataloging tool and also holds inherent historical interest.

[American Board Personnel Card File](#) – The American Board maintained a set of personnel files at its regional office in Istanbul, for Board employees who worked in Turkey and its surroundings. This collection includes a series of more than 1,800 index cards that provide basic information about each individual, such as birth and death dates, educational and employment history, and dates and places of work assignments. The card file includes both missionaries and contract workers who served during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, starting with Revs. Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, the Board's first appointees sent to the Middle East in 1819.

The cards representing 1590 individuals were scanned and uploaded for research are accessible through the Istanbul Digital Library, at the Digital Library for International Research, <http://www.dlir.org/abpcc-home.html>.

[American Board Memorial Book](#) – The initial three-volume work was compiled and edited by Charles Trowbridge Riggs, Near East Mission Secretary from 1910 to 1938, and contained biographical sketches of more than six hundred missionaries. Subsequent to Mr. Riggs' death in 1953, a fourth volume was prepared to include those members of the Mission who died prior to 1970 but were not included in the earlier volumes. The Memorial Book offers fuller biographical sketches of many of the missionaries who served in Turkey, the Balkans, and the Middle East from the early 1800's through 1970. There are 719 individual entries posted to date who represent the entries of the first four volumes. A fifth volume on later personnel is still restricted from publication.

During the second two-month phase, the archivist focused on 1) cataloging and preparing the Near East Relief material for digitizing and 2) completing a finding aid for the Amerikan Bord Collection that had been processed and digitized prior to this grant project.

[Near East Relief](#) – The Near East Relief series was chosen for its potential historical interest. The American Committee for Relief in the Near East was a separate organization that developed in 1915 to help mainly Christian populations of Turkey and the Middle East in the wake of World War I. The agency's nationwide efforts in the United States raised millions of dollars, which were transmitted via the U.S. ambassador and a committee of American citizens in Constantinople to personnel, primarily American Board missionaries, residing in various areas of the Ottoman Empire, who conducted the relief work locally throughout the war. The material in this series consists mainly of administrative records, account records, correspondence, and some published material relating to the Near East Relief and its predecessors. For the series, the archivist created 77 series level record files (around 6,690 pages). Accessible at present are some administrative documentation of NER activities, issues of a newsletter, and a pamphlet.

[Amerikan Bord Collection](#) – The Amerikan Bord Collection is a group of materials selected and stored separately by American Board staff sometime in the past, most probably in the mid-1960s. There is no recorded rationale for the selection of the materials, but they seem to represent records deemed at the time to have historical significance. Generally the collection covers the early phases of the American Board, beginning in the 1820s and covering through the 1960s including one or two later series. The collection consists of around 5,000 catalog entries, most multi-page, which were described and scanned by the American Board itself prior to ARIT's acquisition of the archive. The total page count is around 18,200. Under the grant, the archivist provided enhanced metadata for the 5,000 catalog entries for web publication and developed a finding aid for the collection.

Preservation status

The American Board archive is massive and unprocessed but consists of largely well-packaged and organized materials. Most containers are labeled and self-indexing, and ordered chronologically and alphabetically. The documents are generally in good condition. There are some ragged and brittle pages; paper clips and staples have not been removed. Once the containers have been opened for review, the papers tend to expand, making it difficult to restore

them to the original container. Extensive physical conservation is not needed, but re-folding and boxing in archival containers is desirable.

A significant sample of the document archive, around eight per cent, has been sampled, cataloged to the series or folder level, and digitized. On the basis of this prior work (carried out both prior to and during the grant period), it is now possible to assess which unprocessed containers may hold more interesting material – older documents, manuscripts, correspondence, and mission station reports. Cataloging selected containers to the folder level needs to be carried out in order to help define new series and collections for digitizing.

Other containers hold documents of lesser value – the invoices, money transfers, and the subscription records for the Board’s many publications may serve as examples. In aggregate, it is important to know the wider significance of the financial records – that many Armenians in the U.S. sent money to relatives through the Board, that the Board’s publication had an international subscription base, and that the Board invested portions of the missionaries’ salaries on their behalf. Individually, the documents and individuals involved have less need for extensive cataloging and lower significance for digital preservation.

The sampling and inventories have confirmed the need to employ a combination of folder and series level cataloging in order to access the most valuable research materials with the least amount of processing. A number of themes and subjects have been identified as possible series. Examples include the American Board Near East and Balkan mission foundational records; records of the genocide periods in 1894 and 1915, and collections of documents that focus on major mission stations or large establishments such as hospitals or colleges. Selecting materials for digital preservation and web publication will follow from the cataloging process.

b. Project Accomplishments

The main objectives of the project were accomplished within the time-frame as planned:

- The physical preservation was assessed and standards for arrangement defined.
- The collection was inventoried and sampled to determine the needs for processing.
- The cataloging system and tools were developed to enable the future work.
- An efficient general standard for cataloging has been articulated that employs a combined folder and series level of cataloging.
- Standards to select documents for digitizing will follow the assessment provided in the course of cataloging.
- Two collections and one series of archival documents have been scanned and made accessible.

Because of the size of the collection and the limited time for the assessment, it remains difficult to know the scope of the eventual digital preservation project. Further analysis of the inventories and their probable profiles is underway to develop an estimate and structure the approach.

Lessons Learned.

Proposing to catalog and preserve the American Board archive is a daunting project for a small institution like ARIT. Bringing it to light is fully in line with ARIT’s mission, however, to support U.S. research and exchanges in Turkey. In many ways the project has been lucky in that

the material is in good order; the excellent partners are collaborating well; and the NEH Foundations grant provided generous resources to plan for the greater preservation project.

While luck has played a role, the project is the result of ARIT's relatively long engagement with DLIR to develop digital research resources and to work with the DLIR librarian and web manager. Long cultivation of relationships with the American Board and SALT Archives (and in its earlier existence as the Ottoman Bank Archives and then Garanti Kultur) have also been important. Since 2012, the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul also provided funding to digitize certain rare publications of the American Board library collection (separate from the archive), thereby helping to develop the Istanbul Digital Library. As a small organization, ARIT must reach out to varied resources to carry out a large project of this sort.

c. Audiences

The American Board Archive is largely uncataloged and inaccessible to researchers as yet, so it is not possible to report on a broad range of audiences for the material.

Of the archival material uploaded and shared over the past year, the American Board Personnel Card File has been accessible for the longest time. A report drawn from Google Analytics gives some detail on the page usage shows that in the past year there were 6,630 card views, with an average of 4.6 views per card. As an example of usage, the most viewed name, John F. Allison, had 82 views from 60 unique visits. The heaviest use has been from Turkey and the U.S.

Anecdotally, in communication with missionaries' descendants, it has become clear that the biographical information on the 1,590 missionaries in the Personnel Card File and the 719 individuals in the Memorial Book presented to date will be of interest to many Americans whose family members served the American Board as well as to the various religious denominations that also ran missions around the world.

The American Board Archive project represents strong cooperation between an American institution and a Turkish partner. Both institutions are committed to offering open access to the documentation of a significant aspect of our shared heritage. In many cases, the material itself involves contested events and histories and will provide an opportunity for clarification, dialog, and understanding.

In time, the accessible archive will serve a wide range of interested groups such as religious organizations, family and gender historians, and as well as scholars of U.S., Ottoman, and Turkish history.

d. Evaluation

During the project, archivist Diane Ryan supervised the activities of the SALT and ARIT technical interns working under the grant. Work was conducted under the auspices of the SALT Galata archive, which is a well-equipped fully professional institution. Photography and cataloging of the Personnel Card File and Memorial Books took place at ARIT Istanbul center.

Significant collections of archival materials relating to the American Board missions around the globe are housed in other institutions such as the Houghton Library at Harvard University, Yale Divinity Library, the Congregational Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Columbia

University Library. These libraries have developed finding aids and catalogs that have served as examples and as the basis for interactive cataloging. Archivist Diane Ryan sent the collection level record and finding aid to OCLC's ArchivesGrid as a sample for their evaluation and comment. Research assistant Ellen Eckert affirmed that OCLC could harvest the records and finding aids as Word documents or in HTML format when ARIT-Istanbul is ready to publish them.

Initial public and academic response to the archival materials presented so far is reported above in the discussion of Audiences.

Even with the generous NEH HCRR Foundations grant funds, the good original order of the archive, and the commitment of four months' work from the project archivist plus ARIT and SALT staff, it was a challenge to complete a full assessment of this massive archive in the time allotted. It remains difficult to project the proportion of the material that eventually should be included in the digital archive. The Amerikan Bord Collection, the maps, and the photograph collection were digitized prior to the start of the project. The American Bord Collection and the recently digitized Near East Relief series represent approximately eight percent of the total archive. On the basis of the sample inventories, we estimate that perhaps one-third to one-half of the remaining bulk archive may be worthy of digital presentation.

The archival tools developed during the first half of the project are serving the ongoing work very well. SALT and ARIT interns continue to arrange material and create brief descriptions of selected folders and documents. Using the collection inventory, the team was able to search, extract, and produce series inventories and finding aids. In the second half of the project period, the team was able to process one important series (Near East Relief) and select groups of documents to digitize and present on the SALT and DLIR websites. The initial archival documents illustrate the value of the American Board archive for researchers and the general public in the future.

In general the collaboration with SALT Archives has worked out very well – SALT facilities are state of the art and staff fully professional. SALT's generous contribution to date includes housing the materials in archival conditions and dedicating staff time to processing the archive. They also have digitized the documents of the Near East Relief series and are presenting the images on the web on their Archives website.

As an established archive, SALT is responsible for the preservation of the digital records and website presentation of the bulk of the archival materials. At present they are prepared to upload the photo collection and the Amerikan Bord collection as soon as the metadata is edited. The DLIR, operating through the Center for Research Libraries, is a repository for digital presentation of materials belonging to American overseas research centers. It is hosting the digital editions of the American Board Personnel Card File and Memorial books as well as the American Board library publications.

In the course of the work, there were minor differences between ARIT and SALT Archives over the processing details. Examples include what information should be shared in the metadata, the amount of arranging and scanning to undertake, and which materials to digitize. These questions will continue to be points of productive dialog as we learn the value of materials cataloged.

e. Continuation of the Project

ARIT, SALT, and the American Board archives project director and coordinator in Istanbul are committed to processing and making accessible the important documents of the collection. The director devotes around ten percent full-time effort to the project; the coordinator devotes around half full-time effort. At present, both ARIT and SALT are contributing staff effort toward arranging, cataloging, and digitizing the collection, albeit at a slow pace.

ARIT aims to submit an NEH HCRR Implementation application to help process the American Board archive. We have established the ongoing commitment of partner institution SALT Archives and collaborator the Digital Library for International Research. We are seeking private support for specific thematic aspects of the project as well.

f. Long Term Impact

There are two primary long term impacts of this NEH HCRR Foundations grant. First, the project set up the archival tools and framework for processing the American Board archive. Second, the tools and inventories have enabled planning for processing the collection and providing full access to important documents.

In addition, the grant enabled ARIT to develop the collaboration with its partner SALT Archives in Istanbul. As the long-range project progresses, doubtless the collaboration will also evolve. It is clear, however, that ARIT and SALT can work together in partnership to complete processing the archive.

The initial sets of digitized and published archival materials are already useful for researchers, genealogists, and the general public.

g. Grant Products

1. Archivist Report – The archivist Diane Ryan reported on work progress in two segments.

Archival tools

- Catalog data entry template and metadata scheme based on Dublin Core
- Lists of personal names, place names, and LCNA subject headings
- Style sheet
- Finding aids
- Historical timelines (on-line)
- Maps (on-line)

Inventories The archivist prepared a collection level inventory representing 4,363 files. Total page count is around 315,000, excluding around 3,000 photographs and 100 plans and maps.

Demonstration subject series – The Near East Relief series was searched and extracted from the inventory for further processing. The archivist created 77 series level record files (around 6,690 pages). Included are documentation of NER activities, issues of a newsletter, and a pamphlet.

Finding aids – The archivist prepared finding aids for the Near East Relief and Amerikan Bord Collection series.

2. Initial web presentation of American Board Archive materials:

American Board Archives – Collection description, maps, timelines, <http://dlir.org/arit-american-board-archives.html>.

American Board Personnel Card File – c. 1800 cards representing 1590 individuals scanned and uploaded for research are accessible through the Istanbul Digital Library, at the Digital Library for International Research, <http://www.dlir.org/abpcc-home.html>.

American Board Memorial Book – The first four volumes of the Memorial Book have been scanned and uploaded to the ARIT Istanbul Digital Library at <http://www.dlir.org/abpcc-home.html>.

Near East Relief – An initial presentation of items from the series of American Board records concerning the NER. The first presentation of a sample of the NER archival materials is accessible via the ARIT Istanbul Library and through American Board SALT Archive web page linked at <http://www.dlir.org/aba-official-records-1917-1928.html>.

The Acorne, later titled *Near East Relief* – A nearly complete run of the newsletter of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, a separate organization that developed in 1915 to help mainly Christian populations of Turkey and the Middle East in the wake of World War I.

Hand Book, Near East Relief – a 49-page pamphlet that describes the activities and leadership of the organization then called Near East Relief, issued in October, 1920.

Amerikan Bord Collection –The Amerikan Bord Collection will become accessible soon via the ARIT Istanbul Library and through American Board SALT Archive web page linked at <http://www.dlir.org/aba-official-records-1825-1988.html>.